

Urbanization and Informal Settlement Condition of Dhaka: A Review of Emerging Challenges and Policy Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Dhaka is one of the largest megacities in the world with huge population. With time this city experiences large scale urban development and is facing several urban challenges in terms of basic urban services, transportation system, water supply and sanitation, waste management and housing due to informal urbanization. Because of centralized service facilities and income opportunities the migrant population is increasing with time drastically with their limited affordability of housing and other public services. The immediate consequence of this is the growth of unhygienic slums and squatter settlements. Several development plans as well as policies were formulated to control the urbanization growth and different policy approaches such as eviction, resettlement and upgrading were adopted to deal with informal settlements of Dhaka. These policies approaches were not very effective, because the scale of the problems is very large and the problems are interconnected with complex phenomenon. To address such problems various initiatives have been taken at different scale both in abroad and local scale by different agencies. Based on their essences the regulatory suggestions considering urbanization and informal settlement issues of Dhaka are recommended on this paper understanding the existing situation.

Keywords:-*Urbanization; informal settlement; affordability; regulatory approach*

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization refers to the population increase from rural to urban areas, increase of built-up areas and change of rural nature to urban. With the increase of modernization and industrialization, urbanization is growing in the large cities of the world. Due to more opportunities and facilities in urban areas people are starting to migrate there which creates various challenges on this space like lack of affordable housing, spread of inequality, social and environmental disturbance, change of life style, lack of formal employment etc. (Dhaka Tribune, 2016)[6].

Bangladesh is one of the fastest urbanizing countries in the world. Its urban population is growing at 6 percent each year (World

Bank, 2007). This growth is partly driven by the reclassification of rural areas into urban areas, natural urban population growth and also by considerable rural to urban migration flows. It is important to note that urban areas face the problems of severe poverty and social conditions in Bangladesh. Of an estimated urban population of 35 million people in 2010, 7.35 million are poor, according to the upper national poverty line (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2011)[3]. These localized portions of poverty are given by the slum areas.

Dhaka is the epicenter of Bangladesh's urban expansion for mainly poor, rural migrants arriving each year (World Bank, 2007)[25]. The city receives an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 new migrants mostly

rural poor annually (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2001)[2]. The study found that pull factors such as employment and education opportunities were the main reasons for the shift to Dhaka, but displacement by natural disasters was also a factor (World Bank, 2007)[25]. Such population flows are driven by income differentials between rural and urban areas. In the absence of affordable housing, the constant flow of rural migrants pushes to construct new informal settlements. Informal settlements are residential areas where inhabitants often have no security of land tenure or dwellings with lack of basic services, and is often situated in geographically and environmentally sensitive areas (Jinnah, 2007)[10]. Between 1996 and 2005, the total slum population of Dhaka reached from 1.5 to 3.4 million (CUS, 2006)[4]. A number of interrelated factors influence the informal settlements such as population growth; rural-urban migration; lack of affordable housing; weak governance, planning and urban management; economic vulnerability; and displacement caused by natural disasters and climate change.

Several attempts and approaches have been undertaken by the national government and local authorities to address the slum or squatter situations in the city[24]. Abed (2007) highlighted the problems faced by the poor to get access to justice. A report shows that 135 evictions were happened in Dhaka City from 1975 to 2004 (World Bank, 2007)[25]. Wakely (2007) reports that the reasons for eviction were environmental clean-up, building shopping complexes, land grab and infrastructure development. Again some studies report about the innovative or approaches, mostly adopted by the NGOs to improve living environment of the slum dwellers of Dhaka City. Waste Concern (2005)[23] has worked to develop the waste management system in slum and to improve the environment.

Tripathi (2008)[20] reports about the success of community clustered latrines project managed by the Community Based Organizations of Parish Road slums in Mirpur.

From the above discussion it has been found that many literatures investigated the different aspects of urban informalities of Dhaka city from different perspective separately. To address such challenges a consolidated study needs to be brought forward.

OBJECTIVES

This paper mainly attempts to understand the critical issues or emerging future challenges and undertaken policy approaches to deal with the informal settlements of Dhaka City; and to recommend some appropriate policy regimes based on studies of other countries for their development.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study is based on reviewing literatures about the situation of urbanization, slums and squatters. Fact, finding and issues on slum living conditions have been procured on the basis of general and individual case studies and reports.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Urbanization Condition in Dhaka

The level of primacy of Dhaka as Megacity has been increasing over time. In the 1991 Census, 31% of the country's urban population lived there, but this had climbed to 34% in the 2011 Census (Dhaka Tribune, 2016)[6]. The population density is higher in the core region of the city such as Dhaka North City Corporation and Dhaka South City Council Corporation area, which has significantly increased from 34,629 per square kilometer in 2001 to 49,182 per square kilometer in 2011 (Swapan *et al.*, 2017)[18].

Post-colonial Dhaka urbanized rapidly and many new developments took place with the expansion of the city. Later, government housing was built around the CBD. Gradually the majority of the lands that had been gardens, agricultural lands and wetlands were transformed into organic and haphazard built-up areas to accommodate the growing population (RAJUK, 2016)[15]. Due to the high volume of urban inflow from rural areas, this megacity fails to accommodate additional people. Eventually, the urban poor find their temporary housing in slums and squatters built on public land. Thus the urban expansion has taken place both in administratively and population size. So the immediate consequence of this is the growth of unhygienic slums and squatter settlements (RAJUK, 2016)[15]. With the growing population, an informal economy is growing in the form of street-based self-business, home-based works and construction labor etc. Social exclusion has been taking place and a large proportion of climatic and economic migrants are living in the most vulnerable areas of the city. Land speculation has become exclusive as land prices have increased more than 500% over the last 30 years (Hossain, 2008)[9].

So it can be stated that with time Dhaka experiences large scale urban development and is facing several urban challenges in terms of basic urban services, transportation system, water supply and sanitation, waste management and housing due to informal urbanization. Low income people of the informal settlements are the most vulnerable groups of such emerging challenges.

Socio-Economic Characteristics and Living Environment of informal Settlements of Dhaka City

Private slum property is on the increase compared to public slum property because the government has become more careful

in guarding its land against squatters. Among the slum dwellers, 52.3% live in semi-pucca houses while 39.7% live in katcha dwellings (CUS, 2006). While the overall gross population density for Dhaka is less than 121 persons per acre, the population density in slums is 891 persons per acre. CUS (2006)[4] reported 85.4% of slum resident is living below the poverty line in Dhaka city. Only 10% of slums had sufficient drainage to avoid water-logging during heavy rainfall. Over half were typically fully or partially flooded during monsoon. More than 50% of the slums had no fixed place for garbage disposal. Most of Dhaka slums had no access to safe sanitation. In nearly all slums, latrines were shared. Around 7% slums had either been evicted at least once from their present location or were facing the threat of eviction. 56% of residential structures in the slums were made of low quality materials (CUS, 2006)[4].

Critical Issues and Emerging Challenges

Three critical issues that need to be tackled in urban shelter crisis in Dhaka City are the availability of low-cost urban land which could be utilized for housing the poor; the provision of access to affordable housing; and the organization and participation of the community in planning and implementing low-income housing (World Bank, 2007)[25]. Due to rapid urbanization and housing problems the main challenges of Dhaka city nowadays are: accommodation of huge urban migrants; formulating policies for floating population; finding a better way of eviction ensuring the rights of all; stopping of illegal land grabbing; improving the accessibility of municipal services; promoting sustainable housing for all etc. (Wakley, 2007).

Strategies and Policies to Control Urbanization

The broad sector of urbanization has been considered by the government of

Bangladesh at different times since the independence of the country. These policies and strategies were outlined in the First Five Year Plan and almost all subsequent Five Year Plans including the Seventh Plan (2016-2020) and also in the Habitat National Reports. However, the most comprehensive presentation of urbanization policy and strategy has been in the National Urban Sector Policy. National Urban Policy envisions strengthening the beneficial aspects of urbanization and at the same time effectively dealing with its negative consequences to achieve sustainable urbanization. The policy envisions a decentralized and participatory process of urban development in which the central governments, the local government, the private sector, the civil society and the people all have their roles to play.

Practiced Approaches to Deal with Informal Settlements in Dhaka City

Historically, a number of policy approaches were adopted to tackle the informal settlements of Dhaka City and below are provided a brief discussion of those attempts.

Slum populations in Dhaka City are mostly located temporarily on public or private land and they are often evicted from these locations. It has been reported that the homes of 44 settlements have been demolished in a year making approximately 100,000 people homeless (Rahman, 2001)[16]. Rahman (2001) also observed from the chronological eviction of 1971 to 1995 that eviction had been done with the violation of rules of Government and Local Authority Land and Building ordinance, 1970 which was formulated to preserve the rights of affected people. While the eviction is a traumatic experience in itself, the most harmful impact of eviction may actually be the fear of being evicted. People lose confidence and the situation discourages

them from improving their housing (Paul, 2006)[14].

Resettlement using the sites-and-services schemes was applied through three resettlement schemes which are Dattapara in Tongi, Chanpara in Demra, and Bhashantek in Mirpur. The Dattapara resettlement project was developed for 5000 squatter families. So far this scheme accommodated 1016 squatter families and the rest of the land of the projects has been occupied by unauthorized entities. The project faces some problems such as absence of titles of land right, coordination gap among different service providers etc. (Haque, 2007)[8]. The Chanpara resettlement project was taken to accommodate 5000 squatter families but later used as a site for water treatment plant. But this project needed to be revised several times because of some faults like problematic and expensive development technique, design problems, lack of coordination and leadership of different agencies etc. (Choguill, 1994).

Slum upgrading as a cost-effective approach has been widely used across many developing countries. According to Choguill (1994)[5] a number of advantages of informal housing upgrading can be identified. Like it preserves existing economic systems and opportunities for urban poor; it maintains the community structure and safeguards. Thus upgrading tends to be affordable than sites-and-services projects.

Bangladesh government and different national and international organizations started different slum improvement program but there is lack of housing consideration. Dhaka City Corporation itself established its own Slum Improvement Department in the early 1990s, but fund allocations to this department has always been very small (World Bank, 2007). DCC has

implemented three SIPs - Shahid Nagar, Rosulpur, and Islambagh. Siddique, *et al.* (2002) [17] report that upgrading of physical infrastructure under SIP included the development of footpaths and drains, the installation of tube-wells, latrines, street lighting, which led to improvement of slum environment and quality of life. But maintenance of drains and refuse collection seems very poor in some slums.

All programmes together have made very little impact on improvement of slums in Dhaka, due to the massive scale of the problem (World Bank, 2007). In spite of the good intentions behind the programmes, evaluations have shown that the projects only provided a partial solution to housing problems, because only an insignificant percentage of the urban poor benefited. One important aspect of SIP in urban areas of Bangladesh is the limited involvement of NGOs, both in number and activities (World Bank, 2007). NGOs have not been intensively involved in housing programme in Dhaka City (World Bank, 2007).[25]

Several studies investigated the involvement and activities of NGOs in informal settlement improvement where it was identified that NGOs faces some problems to operate their activities because of strict regulations and lack of coordination. However, some NGOs like NUK (Nari Uddog Kendra) and BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) have provided shelter female garment workers to solve their housing problems (Rahman, 2005; Habib, 2009)[7].

In 1999, Bangladesh Agriculture Bank started the Ghore Phera programme which encouraged slum dwellers to return to their villages by offering loans to start income generating activities. The programme aimed at alleviating urban poverty, reducing rural urban migration, and

improving the city environment through reducing unhygienic slum settlements. According to Bangladesh Agriculture Bank, 1,746 families received loan and returned to their villages and have begun various income generating activities (Rahman, 2005).

Innovative Initiatives and Approaches in Bangladesh

The above policy approaches have limited successes. The description below provides some of those innovative approaches. Matin (1999)[13] describes a process initiated by DSK, an NGO in Bangladesh, for the planning and implementation of a water supply program through intermediation between the communities residing in poor squatter settlements and the formal water supply agency like DWASA. Jinnah (2007)[10] analyzes how a local NGO has been able to help the residents of some Dhaka City's informal settlements in gaining access to public water and sanitation services. Ahmed (2006)[1] reports about an innovative approach developed to render water and latrine services to a rehabilitated Chanpara slum of Dhaka City. While NGO involvement in housing programmes has been limited, some interesting projects do exist that could potentially be appreciated. A promising approach of providing shelters to the poor is a comprehensive and cost-effective hostels for female garment workers run by Nari Uddyog Kendra (NUK). Recently, BRAC has adopted a similar type of project, with the support of the government (Wold Bank, 2007).

According to World Bank (2007), policy changes directed towards creating an effective and enabling environment for urban poor of Dhaka City are the following: implementing the National Housing Policy; strengthening public institutions to implement NHP; promoting coordination between authorities; strengthening the performance of RAJUK;

initiating pilot projects in poor areas in partnership with NGOs; improving legal and regulatory framework; and promoting NGO initiated innovative approaches.

Innovative Initiatives and Approaches from Global Experience

In Bandung of Indonesia government has taken slum upgrading policy from in-situ solutions to vertical housing towers in adaptive urbanism contexts. The manner in which city governments manage informal settlements and slums by facilitating existing disadvantaged communities. While there are no specific solutions for Bandung, the underlying governance of such processes and outcomes need far greater transparency, political commitment and questioning of “who, how and why” decisions are made. In this setting, the role of global institutions such as UN-Habitat[21,22] as well as national and city governments is helpful in explaining new visions considering informal settlement and slum upgrading policies (Jones, 2017)[11].

In Curitiba, by using PROLOCAR program public land, including environmentally sensitive areas are parceled and distributed among homeless families. To control the rapid urbanization in Curitiba, urban area boundaries for future has been delineated by controlling the provision of urban services. Decentralization is also encouraged at some states of Brazil (Macedo, 2000)[12]. “Ant and Rat” approach has been followed in Beijing to accommodate the growing urban population by using vertical expansion under the ground (Youqin, 2013)[26].

CONCLUSIONS

With growing urbanization trend informal settlement is also increasing in Dhaka and the driving factors of urbanization push such informal growth in Dhaka. So it can be concluded that urbanization and growth

of informal settlements are interlinked. A number of basic policy changes are necessary to deal with such situation of Dhaka. Mainly reforms are required in the policy and institutional framework. In addition, there is a need to initiate and promote surrounding secondary cities to diffuse growth of Dhaka city so that a part of existing informal population and future rural migrants will be attracted to these cities.

In the end, it needs to be remembered that poverty and unplanned urbanization are not the only reason for slums, these are also the threatening sign of failed policies, bad governance, inappropriate legal and regulatory frameworks, dysfunctional land markets, corruption, lack of political will etc. (Tannerfeldt and Ljung, 2006)[19]. Therefore, finding a solution to improve the housing conditions of urban low-income groups is a very complex task. The issue involves not only economic but also political problems. So considering all of these issues under regulatory framework through coordination of all agencies, such emerging urban challenges can be brought under control to ensure a better city for all.

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